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ABSTRACT

To improve productivity as well as to encourage personal growth, there has been a limited but determined movement in some higher education institutions to use librarians in non-library related classroom teaching assignments in addition to their regular duties. The experiences of two college librarians who temporarily assumed additional non-library related teaching duties are described, including their impressions of their classroom experience and its effect on their status. Their experiences are interpreted using a description by William Goode concerning the problem of professionalization of librarians and other selected discussions of professional status. (Author/STS)

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Opportunities and Problems of College Librarians Involved in Classroom Teaching Roles

by

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Title

Opportunities and Problems of College Librarians Involved in Classroom Teaching Roles

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Summary

Against the background of an informal institutional program to utilize "emergent professionals" for improved productivity and personal development objectives, the experience of two college librarians in non-library teaching roles is described. Impressions of the librarian-teachers on their classroom experience, and on status enhancement are given for the two cases. The experience is then interpreted using a description by William Goode on professionalization, and selected descriptions of professional status for librarians.

Date

December, 1976

There has been a limited but determined movement in some higher education institutions to use librarians as "emergent professionals" in non-library classroom teaching assignments in addition to their library duties. The rationale for this is mainly one of increased productivity, and is related to the concern for institutional viability in a toughened economic environment. Descriptions of this approach can be found in some recent literature of college and university administration.[1]

This paper reports on the opportunities and problems of two college librarians involved in such an approach and specifically in the assignment of two non-library teaching roles in the undergraduate curriculum. One of the teaching assignments was in a freshman core course, and the other was in an advanced seminar in medieval studies. The experience is interpreted using a description by William Goode concerning the problem of professionalization of librarians and includes other selected discussions of professional status.

Prescriptive statements from the administration of the college in this report note that participation in classroom teaching improves professionalization at the institution and can relate to the evaluation of individuals for faculty status benefits that include institutional tenure. Generally speaking, in the matter of status benefits for librarians, a non-library teaching role could be considered as one pathway to winning full faculty status where it is not presently given. Full faculty status here means receiving all of the same benefits and proportion of compensation as the regular teaching faculty.

The professional librarians and other professionals on the college staff receive various inquiries concerning the teaching role expectation at the institution. Some persons agree during their contract negotiations to teach a specific class during the term of their contract. Others may take the assignment on a non-contractual basis, agreeing to teach after discussions concerning some specific program.

THE CORE COURSE

In one assignment, the librarian undertook to teach a core course for freshmen that is based on a generalist approach rather than on the specialist approach followed in the English literature and composition tradition. The core course is conducted for two semesters so that books, films, dramatic programs, and lectures by visiting speakers are related to a course theme with student discussion the primary orientation.

Among the traditional goals of the course is the teaching of undergraduate academic skills; "acceptable composition of college-level papers, effective participation in discussion ... and an ability to read various materials with speed and comprehension," the writing of three term papers which are "non-research oriented, even though documentation and observance of a standard format are required. Instructors, even those not from the English Department, are expected to evaluate these papers in terms of both form and content."[2]

For the librarian the assignment in this classroom role is a liberating and demanding one. The librarian is integrated into the pedagogic objectives of the course through an instructional staff briefing system. For the relatively inexperienced librarian-teacher this process

amounts to on-the-job teacher training. First, all instructional staff members in the core course program are required to attend weekly meetings of one and a half hour duration. Two instructors from the entire group brief the others each week in rotation on the materials assigned for discussion in class the following week. Second, at these preparatory sessions thematic ideas and teaching techniques are suggested, and questions for papers and exams are also recommended. Third, each instructor is provided with a course manual that details general objectives of the course, gives guidelines for students to follow, provides a basic grading formula, and includes reprints of supplemental reading. Finally, class sections in the core course are kept small, ranging in size from twelve to seventeen students.

Six hours or more were needed weekly by the librarian for conscientious classroom preparation, plus three hours of class time, plus 1 1/2 hour weekly instructional staff meetings. This totalled a minimum 10 1/2 hours devoted weekly to the basic classroom teaching role. The films and lectures also required several more hou s during some weeks, and when written papers were due, the time to prepare questions, grade the papers, and counsel students on their effort was required. Writing skills of some students were found deficient, and class and office time had to be arrang.. for diagnostic work.

Most weeks the librarian-teacher devoted at least fifteen hours to the new teaching role and this usually resulted in a fifty-five hour work week.

Effectiveness of the librarian-teacher in the core course classroom was not officially monitored by observers. At the last class meeting before final exams, all of the students filled out a sixty-item course evaluation questionnaire which had been developed and used over a five-year period. Each instructor received a print-out copy of the results which contained fifteen items related to teaching performance.

The course chairman and other experienced teaching faculty were also helpful in discussing the problems and remedial techniques needed to improve teaching. The weekly instructional staff meetings also resulted in a trade-off of ideas that could be useful in the classroom.

THE TEAM-TAUGHT, ADVANCED SEMINAR

In the second assignment, the Academic Dean appointed the Reference Librarian to a committee representing various college constituents to draw up a proposal for revitalizing the humanities at the college.

As the work of the Humanities Committee progressed the Reference Librarian worked more closely with two teaching faculty members constructing a segment of the proposal dealing with the humanities in the medieval period.

To design a specific syllabus for the medieval module the Reference Librarian was released for twelve hours per week. It was eventually agreed that this module would be team-taught by the librarian with one of the teaching-faculty members who had worked on the original proposal.

The rationale for each of the humanities' modules was to provide intensive exposure to a period using an interdisciplinary approach. The medieval studies seminar itself opened with an introductory week followed by a series of topics such as "The Cathedral," "The Knight and the Lady," "The Medieval Imagination." It concluded with a week of synthesis culminating in a student group project intended to summarize the learning of the previous six weeks. Students were required to read ten texts in whole or in part, and to present two oral reports from a list of topics written into the syllabus. Students could choose the amount of credit they wanted from the course. Allowances then had to be made for the number of papers required. Officially, the librarian was released twenty hours per week to teach the course. In actual fact, the replacement covered twelve hours of reference desk service. With the agreement and support of the library director, the librarian was free to take the time needed for class work during the seven weeks of the course. The librarian-teacher spent two days each week keeping up with library

duties as Head of the Reference Department. Three days were devoted to the teaching assignment, in addition to numerous evening and weekend hours spent in preparation for classes.

One weakness in the team-taught seminar resulted from a major difference in the educational approach of the two teachers. Although both had collaborated on the original proposal and in the design of the medieval syllabus, they did not fully discuss goals, methods and objectives as they applied to the actual teaching of the course until well into the second week of the seminar. Only then did the differences in approach become apparent. For example, the librarian-teacher felt that some background information could have been given prior to student reading and discussion to place the material in perspective and relate it to the overall course. The teaching-faculty member felt this would inhibit student participation, and that discussions should not be structured but should be allowed to develop as the students were inclined to make contributions

IMPRESSIONS OF THE TEACHING ROLES

Some advantages were clearly observed as a result of the non-library classroom experience. The teaching role created added visibility for both librarians because of closer contact with students. The experience also allowed the librarians to interact with faculty on a peer level rather than in the more administrative role in which librarians are

generally thought to operate. Not the least of the rewards for both librarians was an increased intellectual stimulation resulting from being able to concentrate in an academic area, an opportunity not always afforded in the small liberal arts college.

However, the opportunity described in these cases produced some professional side-effects best posed by the following questions:

1. Does the librarian-teacher in an academic discipline undercut the librarian's role in bibliographic instruction? This involves the whole issue of whether bibliographic instruction is necessary or even desirable on the undergraduate level. Librarians may think so, but do the teaching-faculty agree? Relatively little in library skills awareness could be built into the kind of subjective discussions that developed in the classroom assignment encounters. Occasionally the importance of the library as a resource could be shown by librarians in both teaching cases, but only briefly.

2. Does the teaching role reinforce the stereotype of the other, non-teaching librarians as clerical types rather than as professionals? Is the impression created that the work of the "professional librarian" is indeed less important, and even dispensable?

3. Is the interest in teaching in an academic discipline a betrayal of "library professionalism?" Does it reinforce the image of the librarian as not being intellectually credible unless there is involvement in an academic speciality?

4. Can librarians be accepted as peers of the teaching-faculty because they are professionals in their own right, or only because they are teaching outside of the library? Will librarians inevitably have to keep playing the Avis game by "trying harder" - i.e., by following the academic model of the teaching faculty?

Another question seems important too. Is the status of the librarian improved through such teaching roles, and is a more professional stance achieved at the institution? While no objective tests could be employed, the most significant measure of this type of experience will come from the final decision to grant a tenured appointment following the established faculty evaluation procedures. This remains to be done in future time, and the present situation at the institution appears to fit Goode's description of librarians sharing in the emulation of professional rank and status:

> "This is, of course, a bootstrap operation. It is not possible to obtain the status and then get the advantages. The increasing advantages must parallel the intrinsic changes towards professionalism, in a virtuous spiral which is nevertheless extremely slow."[3]

A more immediate measure of status and professionalization involves our impressions of the attitudes of other faculty, the dean, and administrators of the institution towards their librarian colleagues. As noted earlier the impression is distinctly that the librarian-teacher does acquire respect and friendship from these groups and from individuals for such teaching duty.

A more collegial association seemed apparent to the librarians in committee assignments, social groups, and also on a personal level. Colleagueship seemed enhanced and practiced because of identification as a teacher. However, even if this can be confirmed and the permanent appointment with all rights and privileges is won, the basic question of movement to full professional status of academic librarians through this type of program still requires analysis by members of the profession.

In 1961 William Goode argued that librarians in general are not likely to achieve the status of a full profession. The reasons he gave were not just because of problems in fitting the definition of the term "Professionalization"- i.e., acquisition of special skill and training, minimum qualifications, associations and codes, community recognition, etc... Goode also had the strong impression that librarians responded to the expressed desires of their clients, rather than to client needs as defined by the librarians themselves.[4] He maintained that a service orientation in terms of professionally-defined needs is an essential element of professionalization. Thus, in the cases described above and using Goode's words, the academic librarian in the non-library teaching assignment "accepts the task of facilitating the implementation or achievement of standards of excellence whose definition and custodianship belong to others."[5] In the academic library setting these others are the teaching-faculty, and in a competitive college environment they are additionally enjoined by economy-minded academic planners. This interpretation of Goode's impression cannot be set aside easily.

Morrison for example, thought that his study of academic library executives indicated some measure of "a failure on the part of librarians to accept, psychologically, their proper role as professional people." [6] In arguing mildly against Goode's interpretation, he seems actually to have reinforced it. Morrison noted that the status of the profession is in proportion to the ability of librarians to accept challenges inherent in academic librarianship.

> "What is lacking is information, in depth, of the real commitments of academic librarians. To what standard to they really subscribe? Should they be encouraged to change these affiliations in the interest of higher professional and economic status?" [7]

Intended or not, Morrison's questions presaged conditions that some academic librarians would have to follow as they pursued a professional career line based on the academic model.

The development of this interpretation also employs a question posed by Hughes. For what are the people being trained or prepared? In his description of professions in transition, Hughes noted that the most successful librarian was no longer a librarian, but an administrator. [8] In our description, and in similar experiences in academe we suggest that the status-successful college librarian may now be in a movement of de-professionalization as a librarian, and re-professionalization as a part-time teacher.

Bundy and Wasserman, in their thoughtful reconsideration of librarianship as a profession, highlight Goode's early impression

concerning the librarian-client relationship. They reiterate, "The professional knows,"[9] and they point out that an aggressive role in information prescription can lead to improved client esteem. They also note, however, that the institutions in which librarians perform can influence accommodation to requirements which are not necessarily reinforcing of the professional-client relationships of librarianship.[10] In the assignments described here, the first order is the client's desire, and that is to have librarians teach non-library subjects.

When viewed broadly, a relentless pressure from a professional academic model can be said to be building in Good's virtuous spiral. Even such alternatives as the open system model of the library profession proposed by Hanks and Schmidt,[11] which is highly client-oriented, does not have the necessary definition or command sufficient interest to influence this relentless pressure of the academic model. Our description of the non-library teaching role, and our interpretation using Goode and others has attempted to indicate how changing affiliations can occur as a condition of institutional stress and change. Other academic librarians, especially those with second master's degrees and terminal degrees, have filled or will be filling non-library teaching roles in other cases. All will experience phases of conversion into the professional academic model. It may be that Goode's virtuous spiral of professionalization of librarians is undergoing one of its rare motions, forcing the academic group into a movement beyond its control or not of its own making. It may also be the case that this movement will have an important long-term influence on the career

development pattern not only in academic librarianship, but on the structure of librarianship generally.

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